



Poland: a US Trojan horse' in Europe?

military-Earth thinking notebook

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In the early 1990s, "post-people's" Poland began a resolutely Atlanticist foreign policy, to the extent that it was sometimes considered a "Trojan horse" [1] of the United States in Europe. The recent evolution of relations between the two countries, motivated by multiple factors, seems nevertheless to testify to the Polish will to "strategically rebalance" the relationship between the United States and the European Union.

1) The expression, used in several publications, was coined by Polish MP Mateusz Piskorski.

The radically changed geopolitical context, in which it found itself as early as 1989, forced Poland to redefine its foreign policy. Considering the United States as the only power capable of providing it with tangible security guarantees in the face of possible imperialist temptations from Russia, successive governments in Warsaw are pursuing an intense policy of bilateral rapprochement with them.

Its culmination is the bilateral strategic partnership signed in August 2008.

The political developments that have taken place since then, such as the retreat of the Poles from their "closest ally", do not call into question the ties forged between the two countries.s but explains their apparent desire for a "strategic rebalancing" between NATO (and the United States) on the one hand, and the European Union on the other.

The US-Polish strategic partnership has expressed itself in the areas of anti-missile defence and cooperation between the armed forces, without, of course, omitting armaments cooperation.

Missile defence and nuclear disarmament

In Poland's view, anti-missile defence and nuclear disarmament are part of the same security problem: the possible emergence of a threat from the East.

On 17 September 2009, without any real prior consultation with Warsaw, the newly elected American President Obama announced the abandonment of the project to deploy in Poland the ten long-range American interceptor missiles GBI [1] planned. 1] The disappointment of the Poles is all the greater because at the same time they were already aware at that time of American reticence regarding the deployment of the PATRIOT system.[2] on their floor[3]. From the outset, the issue of missile defence was therefore based on misunderstandings between the two countries, stemming from different strategic visions.

For Poland, the Iranian, or North Korean, nuclear threat is indeed perceived as possible, but secondary compared to that which may come from countries closer to its borders. This conviction, which is also part of a historical perspective, remains particularly strong.

This is evidenced by the marked satisfaction of the Poles with the announcement made at the NATO summit in Lisbon in November 2010 of the creation of a NATO missile defence system and, conversely, theOn the other hand, there is concern about unconfirmed reports[4] of the deployment of SS-26 ISKANDER tactical missiles[5] in the Kaliningrad enclave, supposedly capable of carrying a nuclear warhead and reaching their capital.

During the meeting of the American and Polish Presidents in Washington on 8 and 9 December 2010, Barack Obama reaffirmed that the deployment in Poland of American SM-3 interceptor missiles as early as 2018 was still envisaged. This news was greeted with cautious enthusiasm by the Poles: the deadline is far away and, although the development of a land-based version is underway, the SM-3 currently exists only in a naval version.

Moreover, the Russian leadership has made it clear that an arbitrary deployment of American interceptor missiles in Poland could lead to their denunciation of the new nuclear disarmament treaty or even to the revival of an arms race.

Poland's strong support for the United States under START 3 is also motivated by the Russian "threat". On the other hand, the Poles expect the Americans to take action on tactical nuclear arms reduction, which the treaty does not take into account.[6]

Cooperation of the armed forces

There are two complementary aspects of Polish-American military cooperation: the Polish engagement in Afghanistan and the US military presence on Polish territory.

The participation of Polish forces in the Iraqi campaign, as well as in the current NATO operation in Afghanistan, aims at proving Poland's commitment to international security[7], while at the same time providing the Americans with proof of loyalty.[8]

The primary purpose of Poland's external military engagement is political.[9]

Polish enthusiasm in this area has diminished. President Bronisław Komorowski is more cautiously "Atlanticist" than his predecessor Lech Kaczyński. Moreover, the American repercussions of this commitment do not seem to have fully lived up to Polish expectations. Added to this are the reservations recently expressed by "anonymous

American military officials" concerning the effectiveness of Polish troops in the province of Ghazni (where 800 American soldiers are, moreover, placed under Polish operational command)[10]. 10] President Komorowski's critical comments on NATO's current strategy in Afghanistan, such as his repeated call for a "de-escalation" of the Polish army's role in Afghanistan, have been echoed by the Polish authorities.[11], would tend to show that the time of unconditional support to the United States is over.

If the Polish president is rather reserved about NATO's expeditionary vocation, he nevertheless remains deeply attached to its defensive vocation.

The permanent or temporary presence in Poland of elements of the armed forces of other Alliance countries - and, above all, of the United States - is still seen as an indispensable element contributing to the strengthening of the country's security. The same applies to the holding of major Allied exercises on its soil.[12].

In this respect, the Poles seem to have been reassured by the confirmation of the arrival, in rotation, of American F-16 fighter aircraft (16 aircraft) and C-130 transport aircraft (4 aircraft) from mid-2013. While the Americans, however, perceive this presence above all as being intended for the joint training and instruction of the air forces, the Poles have not yet been able to take advantage of the new aircraft. The Polish officials, including Stanisław Koziej, head of the Office of National Security (BBN), have raised the possibility of the future inclusion of this air component in NATO's Polish-Baltic contingency plan.

Armaments cooperation

The primacy given in past years to the acquisition of equipment of American origin also had a political dimension from the Polish point of view. The purchase, on credit, of the 48 F-16 fighters is emblematic in this respect.

Most of the American equipment was acquired in the framework of American aid in the form of loans, whether repayable or not, without obtaining licences. The clauses in the contracts or, quite simply, the very specific nature of the equipment, grant American companies, de jure or de facto, exclusive rights to support this equipment. This is the case, for example, of the two Oliver Hazard Perry class frigates delivered to Poland, only one of which is currently seaworthy. Maintaining them in good condition, modernising them and purchasing the onboard munitions represents a significant expense for the Polish defence budget, which is hampering progress in the construction of the national corvette "Gawron".

The disillusionment caused by the growing awareness of the financial implications of non-disinterested American aid, the limits of technology transfers made in the context of offsets and the lack of a clear idea of the financial implications of such aid.[13] and, overall, the importance to be attached to operating costs - and not just procurement costs - have led the Poles to be more cautious when it comes to equipping their armed forces.

The growing willingness to participate in European programmes[14] within the framework of the EDA[15] This is a perfect illustration of this trend, as is the development of the national defence industry's own capabilities and the use of calls for tenders that do not immediately favour the American option.[16]

While it remains committed to strong bilateral ties with the United States, and aligns its foreign policy with its own in terms of normalisation of relations with Moscow, the EU will

continue to pursue a policy of openness to the United States. Its only role as a "best friend" or "Trojan horse" in Europe seems to become less and less relevant. After the WikiLeaks affair, Prime Minister Donald Tusk said: "If there is anything worrying, it is the light that these leaks shed on the character of the relationship between the United States and Poland, and with other allies. It is a rather sad satisfaction for me to know that even in our relations with our closest allies we have to pursue a policy without illusions".

Poland aspires, on the basis of historical and geographical considerations, to play a leading role as an intermediary in the game between East and West, both within the framework of the Atlantic Alliance and the European Union.

Its desire to strike a new balance between what it considers to be its two major security pillars explains the ambitions of the European Union for its future EU Presidency^[17] and the support it expects, in that framework, from the European countries it considers itself closest to.

[1] Ground Based Interceptors.

2] Ground-to-air missile system with anti-ballistic missile capabilities.

3] Dispatch from the American Embassy in Warsaw, 13 February 2009.

4] Published by the Wall Street Journal and reprinted on 1 December 2010 by the Polish daily "Dziennik".

5] Or STONE as NATO. Range of about 500 kilometres.

6] It seems that a reflection on this subject has begun in Washington, while knowing that negotiations can only take place in a global framework and not exclusively on a bilateral basis. This will make the determination of the limitations even more complex compared to the START 3 system of parity.

7] However, the small but real terrorist threat that could affect the Poles is only a consequence of this participation.

8] The facilities granted to the CIA on Polish territory between 2003 and 2005 were further proof of this loyalty. The supposed nature of American intelligence activities in Poland and their possible knowledge by the local authorities have, however, become the object of embarrassing polemics.

9] This applies just as much to its participation in EUFOR TCHAD-RCA (2008-2009), aimed at demonstrating its willingness to engage within the European Union and, more specifically, in the CSDP.

10] Quoted in December 2010 by the American magazine "Time".

11] End 2012 for the purely military operation.

12] Including the forthcoming "STEADFAST JAZZ 2013".

13] Compensations.

14] The last example is that of the future "MUSIS" observation satellite (letter of intent of November 2010).

15] European Defence Agency.

16] From this point of view, the calls for tenders launched in 2011 by the Polish Ministry of Defence's newly centralised structure - the Armaments Inspectorate - could be revealing.

17] During which it will be the privileged European interlocutor of the United States.

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